

the Chicken or the Egg?

by Jenerator

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Summary: What if a familiar villain kidnapped Clark Kent and Dean Cain and swapped them over?

the Chicken or the Egg?

Author's notes: This is a revelation story with a difference. It came out of a lot of discussion on an idea I had and discussed with quite a few people on IRC.

Dedications: To all my friends on IRC who have helped me out with this work, thanks so much... I won't try to give credit to everyone, because so many people have helped with this, giving me constructive criticism on my first attempt at writing L&C fanfic on my own (sort of), that I've forgotten who suggested what. I hope that everyone enjoys this story as much as I've enjoyed working on it. The only exception I would like to make about giving credit is with regard to the scene at the TV Studio, written by Tracey Barlow (barlow@ozramp.net.au).

Disclaimers: Insert the regular disclaimer here about who owns what characters. It is not my intention to infringe on any copyrights owned by anyone. No-one is going to make any money out of this story, so if you are thinking of suing me, don't waste your time. Obviously, no-one owns Dean, Teri or the rest of the cast and crew, and I hope that what I've written isn't too, too different to how they would react if this really did happen to them! I don't actually know much about their private lives, so I've had to make up quite a bit. If you dislike those aspects of this story, pretend it isn't our world that I'm referring to, but an alternate one very similar. Oh, and you might find the ending a bit familiar ... Words in 'single quotes' are thoughts. Words in "double quotes" are spoken. Any comments (nice ones only, please!) to jenerator@free.net.au Now sit back and enjoy as we wonder, which came first...

...the Chicken or the Egg?

By Jenny Stosser

Prologue One

Clark sat dejectedly on the top of the highest pylon on the Metropolis Bridge. He didn't know what his next move should be, and he hated not knowing what the next step of a plan was. He knew what it ought to be... he had tried (Lord knew how hard he had tried!) to tell Lois who he was; to tell her his greatest secret. But it was so ingrained in him to keep the secret that every time, just as he was about to tell her all, his senses would kick in and he'd become aware of an emergency, giving his subconscious an "out". Of course, that didn't make things any better at all between him and Lois. It really made things worse, because every time he had to deal with an emergency, he had to give another of those lousy excuses. And as the excuses got worse, and Lois got more suspicious of him, he could see the future of their relationship going down the gurgler.

Clark realised that he had to come to a decision. He had to grab the future he wanted with both hands and not let it go. He would go down there to her apartment now and tell her. It didn't matter that it was the middle of the night. It didn't even matter that she had almost died facing that Mazik character. In fact, that lent even more force to his decision. All that mattered was getting his secret out into the open. He stood up and stepped off the pylon into midair, when suddenly the air shimmered in front of him. As if a fog had suddenly swept in from somewhere, the air before Clark misted over, and he could almost see a person standing there beside him. And a panicky person at that. Clark instinctively reached out and offered a hand to help the man, but no-one was more surprised than he, when the man reached through the fog and grabbed the offered hand!

"You have to help us, Superman!"

Forgetting everything he had been about to do, he switched into "Superman mode" and asked the bearded man what the problem was.

"There's a bomb! They said it was hidden in the school, but no-one has been able to find it, and the deadline is coming closer! You have to help us find it! No-one on our world can help us!"

"Hang on, slow down a moment, Sir!" Superman had understood that there was an emergency, but was confused by the man's reference to 'our world'. "Take a deep breath," he instructed.

The man paused, and straightened his suit jacket, but ignored the fact that they were both floating so far above the bay.

"Superman," he began again, "I really hope you are able to believe me. I'm a scientist of sorts. I'm from another dimension. It is a place very similar to Earth, with a very similar history to here, but for one major difference; You don't exist there. In fact, over there, Superman is only a myth."

"So how did you manage to get here? How did you even manage to hear of here?"

Sounding exasperated, the man sighed, "We don't have much time Superman, the deadline for that bomb is getting closer! Don't you think I should explain this to you after you come back with me?"

Quickly weighing up his options, Superman made a decision. If the only problem was to disarm a bomb in order to save some children, and if it was a quick trip, he should be able to be back home later tonight, which meant he should still be able to get down to business with Lois, telling her the truth.

"OK, Sir, just how do we go about crossing over to your world, then?"

"My machine is just behind me in the temporal rift. Come back through it with me, and we'll be there in no time at all."

Taking him by the arm again, the man led Superman into the fog. As they moved deeper into it, he began to perceive an odd looking machine. More than anything else, Clark was reminded of the machine used in George Pal's 1950s movie The Time Machine. It looked intricate in the way of machines from the dawn of the industrial age, all brass, and polished wood. The machine sat atop a detailed Persian rug on a platform, floating, as were Superman and the scientist. It had two cane seats, and in front of one of the seats, as in a car, was a dashboard with controls on it. The scientist took the seat in front of the controls, indicating that Superman should take the other seat.

Clark watched as the man fiddled with the dials and vacuum tubes before him. Suddenly the world went monochrome around them, before becoming so blindingly bright that even Clark squinted his eyes shut. Clark felt himself turning inside out and back again, and even found himself wondering whether this was what it felt like to want to throw up, when just as suddenly the world came back into focus.

At the same time as his eyes began to re-focus, so did Clark's brain. As if a light had clicked on in his brain, he suddenly remembered where he had met this man before. He remembered everything that had happened with himself and Lois and HG Wells, and realised that this man was not the scientist he purported to be.

"There is no bomb, is there, Tempus?" Clark queried his kidnapper woozily.

Tempus had seen the lights come on, but he was aware of how Clark's mind would be inclined to wander as a result of the trip, as his brain tried to accommodate to the change of universes, and, landing the so-called "time machine", he spoke again to Clark.

"Well, I see that a long explanation isn't really necessary. What is true - well, to some extent anyway, is that I could call myself a sort of scientist! I'm experimenting-with you! You see, I wanted to see what would happen to you in a world where no-one believes in superheroes in real life, only in fiction. You're not really a Superman here, but you play one on television."

Clark was mainly aware of the world fading in and out, and of the difficulty he was having staying conscious - or was that "sane"?

Tempus caught Clark's attention by dint of grabbing his face and forcing Clark to look into his eyes.

"Watch the video!" Tempus instructed, and then he turned and vanished back into the mist surrounding the time machine, as the air reverberated around it.

Clark was very disoriented, and wished he had been able to sort out his brain enough to ask a few more questions, but Tempus was gone and it didn't look like he'd be back for a while. But, trying to make the best of a bad situation, Clark searched the well-appointed residence he'd been "dropped into", and quickly found the video recorder to which Tempus must have been referring.

There were two tapes sitting there, but no indication as to which he should watch first. He took one and found it was marked "The Pilot", with his own S-Shield on it, and, realising it was the longer of the two tapes, chose to leave watching it until later. Inserting the other tape into the recorder, he pressed Play, and levitated into a comfortable position to watch it.

It was a very brief tape: Tempus got right down to basics.

"You are an actor, playing Clark Kent now," he said. "You should find it easy enough to be yourself for the cameras!"

'I don't even know the name of the actor!' Clark was beginning to feel a little panicky about this whole situation. Maybe he shouldn't have done this without thinking it through first!

"For more information watch the other video. You will note the similarity in looks between yourself and this world's version of Superman. This is because I picked him for the part of playing you on this world! On my previous trip, I -ahem- arranged for him to take your place in your home universe.

"A word of warning: Even you should be able to figure out what people would think if you tried to tell them who you are and where you're from." Tempus wrapped his arms around himself and mimed being in a strait-jacket, sticking his tongue out. Clark could just imagine Tempus drooling slightly.

"Now, I'm going to let you make your own way here. You have one night to recover from the effects of your trip, and tomorrow morning, you'll be picked up to go to the studio for another day's filming. Have an interesting - er - experience! I'll try to be back for you in three days."

Prologue Two

"Hey!" One of the crew members caught Dean's attention as he walked off the set, "Lane Davies is hanging around waiting to see you. Said it was something private he needed to talk to you about."

At the end of a long day of filming, Dean was dying to get out of the costume, but he supposed he should just go see what Lane wanted before heading back to his trailer to get changed.

He could see Lane waiting in the lee of the trailer anyway. "Yeah? Some of those Krypton FanClub people mentioned that you would be back on the set for a new episode... what can I do for you?"

"Dean! You'll never believe what I found in the storage rooms! You have just got to see this!" Dean looked, and said, "Yeah? So? It's the time machine from your first episode? What about it?"

"Dean, sit down, take a load off, I can see you're tired after today's filming. Here, lemme show you what I discovered about this machine! It does the most amazing things!"

"Really?" Dean watched in interest as Lane fiddled with the buttons and knobs on the dash of the machine. "Woah!" Dean suddenly felt himself turning inside out and back again, and almost wanted to throw up, when just as suddenly the world came back into focus. Dizzily he asked, "What was that?"

"Um, Dean, I have some bad news for you."

Groggily he looked up at the man who sat beside him, "Do I really want to know, Lane?"

"Dean, I'm not Lane Davies. I'm Tempus, and you are in MY world now. Guess what, Superman?" And with a snide grin on his face, he concluded, "You're Superman!"

With that, the devil in a stylish suit stepped off the time machine and sauntered whistling down the street, leaving Dean, all alone in a strange world.

Chapter One

Dean Cain is an intelligent man. While this whole affair had a dream-like quality to it (who would believe this anyway?) the buildings around him looked too solid to be a trick played by cast or crew members. And anyway, practical jokes were Dean's department, no-one else's! As soon as he had realised that Tempus was for real, and that he had been left in a predicament, he realised a number of things. First, he was stranded, in a Superman suit, presumably in a place where people would identify him as Superman, not as someone who pretended to be him. Also, as far as he could tell, things were happening in a sequential order, unlike the way his dreams usually occurred. He had no idea how this had happened, but whether or not it was a dream, he figured he'd better let it play itself out to completion.

Second, he wasn't Superman, so he wouldn't be able to do the things expected of Superman.

Third, he needed someone to help him acclimatise to this place, especially if he was stranded here indefinitely.

And fourth, he needed to figure out how to get home.

'Actually,' he thought, 'that last one shouldn't be too difficult. After all, Tempus has left me with the machine. Now all I need to do is figure out how to use it to get back home again. He worked those controls, and I'm sure I can figure out how to work them too, but I may need some help to work out what not to do! I wonder whether this place works according to scripts I've already seen and played? Or whether it is totally different?'

As he worked through these thoughts, Dean was carefully hiding the

time machine in the alleyway in which he and Tempus had arrived, so that he would be able to return to it once he had figured out how to get back home.

By the time he had finished camouflaging the machine with garbage, his mind had turned to his next requirement. He needed to find someone to help him figure out this place.

'Well, I guess I have a few choices. First up, I think would have to be Martha and Jonathon Kent, except that they probably aren't here in Metropolis, and I can't exactly fly to Kansas. Next best might be that Dr Klein at STAR Labs. How am I supposed to get in touch with him? I have no idea! Which leaves me with Lois. Well, in a place the size of Metropolis, surely anyone can point out The Daily Planet to me?' Supposing that he couldn't spend the rest of his enforced stay in Metropolis in the alleyway, and that he didn't really want to anyway, Dean decided that it was time to venture out into the open. Much to his surprise, as he looked around, trying to get his bearings, he found that he had been set down in the alley way right behind the newspaper. At the sight of the Daily Planet building, Dean was hit once again by just how real this whole dream felt. But it couldn't be a dream... or could it? It had to be...

'Well, that was easy enough,' he thought. 'Maybe this is all some sort of elaborate hoax,' he wished to himself, walking into the front lobby of the building. But that hope was dashed when he entered the city room, and everyone looked at him with the belief in who he was supposed to be obvious in their eyes.

"Hey! Superman! What can I do for you, my man?" A familiar voice penetrated his thoughts.

"Jus- er, Jimmy! Hi." Dean wondered momentarily whether Jimmy Olsen would be able to help him out, but decided against it. Lois would be a better bet, as she could help him to disguise himself as Clark Kent instead of Superman. "Um, do you know where I can find Lois today, Jimmy? I have something I need to discuss with her."

"Lois?" Jimmy was obviously puzzled. "Perry told her to take the day off, Superman. I thought you knew! After she helped you and CK and his parents out with those blackmailers, she took the rest of the week off to recover." Conspiratorially, Jimmy led Dean into the Conference Room, and leaned closer to Superman, then added, "I'm glad you managed to stop that guy Mazik, Superman! I really hated to see Clark in such pain!"

Dean was very surprised, but realised that Lois (and the rest of this world) must have just been through what, to him, was the second season finale of Lois & Clark! 'Great!' He thought to himself, 'Lois already knows that Clark is Superman. That will make my "stay" a lot easier!'

"Um, Jimmy, this is going to sound a bit weird, but can you do me a favour? And not tell the world?"

Jimmy nodded assent. "Sure Superman, anything I can do for you, you know I will!"

"Um, see this suit? Well, it doesn't exactly have pockets. I need to borrow some money from you. Um, say twenty bucks? I can't tell you

what it's for. But I'll make sure that you get the money back as soon as I can."

Jimmy looked at Dean strangely, but figuring that Superman must need it, he took out his wallet and gave Superman the cash.

"Thanks Jimmy. You really are a great pal. OK, I have to go now. I guess I'll see you 'round!" Dean headed back toward the elevator, not noticing the look he got from Jimmy when he didn't leave via the window.

Once outside the Planet again, Dean was about to hail a cab to take him to 348 Hyperion Avenue, to see Lois. But he remembered in time that Lois wasn't married to Clark yet, and looked up her address at the nearest public phone booth (this gained him some more odd looks from passers-by). Then Dean hailed a cab and gave the driver Lois' address.

Chapter Two

(Meanwhile back in the real world...) Clark understood that if what Tempus had told him about this world was true, he couldn't go around in his Superman suit. For one thing, he would probably be laughed out of any establishment he chose to enter.

He found that he was frightened at the thought of facing a world like this, and subconsciously chose to "distance" himself from his situation. He ejected the Tempus' video and inserted the one with his shield on it and sat back to see what it was all about, and soon became totally enthralled in seeing his own story on screen. How well he remembered his first day at The Planet! How well he remembered his first meeting with Lois! How well he remembered how he had felt wearing his suit for the first time! And how it had felt for Lois to actually notice him! How poorly they had cast Jimmy! This guy didn't look a bit like the Jimmy he knew. And yet... and yet, it was amazing how everyone else looked so right.

At the end of the episode, Clark watched carefully and noted the names of the actors, because he knew from what Tempus had said about the next day's schedule that he would need to know these peoples' names. So he was supposed to be Dean Cain, and Lois was Teri Hatcher? He was sure he had seen that name somewhere ... That's it! Those magazines under the videos! "I was Teri Hatcher's first husband!" Tabloid fare, obviously, but then, possibly a way for Clark to learn more about his "co-star"? As he read the article, he realised that he had been right. This National Enquirer was this world's equivalent of his own's National Inquisitor. It was hard to tell which was the worse publication. But at least he learned a little of what to expect of Ms Hatcher. At the back of the magazine, in the "Hot Gossip" section, he even found a reference to Mr Cain. Apparently he was quite popular with women, and was going through young movie stars at quite a rate. Clark didn't know whether to like his doppleganger or not. But there were no recent photos of him, only of Ms Hatcher in that edition of the magazine.

Looking around the house he was in, Clark was very impressed, and found himself wishing that he made that sort of money. Dean Cain appeared to be more laid-back than Clark was: obviously someone who enjoyed good food, and the perhaps-more-than-occasional beer. The place was a bit of a mess; but then, Clark realised, he wouldn't have

had super-speed to dash around and clean up as quickly as Clark himself often did.

Clark was concerned at first that he didn't have his glasses with him, and that everyone would recognise him immediately as Superman, until he recalled that in this universe, no-one believed in Superman or even in aliens from other planets. (His own planet had had experience with aliens other than himself, so they had no reason not to believe. But from what Tempus had said, it was entirely possible that in this universe, Earth was the only inhabited planet!) It was unlikely that he would need glasses, Clark realised, when he came across some photographs of the actor (not framed and on the mantelpiece, he was glad to note, which implied that the actor wasn't in love with himself alone) and he was amazed to learn that he and the actor truly did look exactly alike - without glasses. At first, Clark wasn't sure, but then it occurred to him to hold the photos up to the mirror and compare the view with the reflected image of himself, which he had been unable to do with the video he had watched. He wondered again about Tempus' comment about Dean being chosen by Tempus to play the part, and he wondered whether that was true, or whether it was just Tempus' ego talking there. At any rate, as far as Clark could tell, he and Dean Cain almost could have been the same person, had it not been for Clark's super powers!

He found a wardrobe and changed into some of the clothes there, noting a few things about this person he was supposed to be: first, he didn't have the same dress sense as Clark himself, and second, despite that, the clothes fit him perfectly, yet another confirmation of the similarities between two people from two different universes.

But he couldn't find a single interesting tie in the whole wardrobe!

Clark wondered how many other things were different or similar about them. And he became concerned that it would be difficult to pretend to be someone who, although he might look exactly like him, might have totally different views on the world and life in general.

Shortly after changing into Dean's clothes, Clark became aware of the sound of dogs barking. Looking around the house quickly, he realised that there were three dogs in the backyard, all barking wildly.

"Uh-oh," he thought. "They must belong to Dean."

Clark knew that if he was to fit in and be the actor for even a few days, he would need to make himself known to the dogs, so that they wouldn't give his secret away to any visitors who might come calling. So he headed out to them to introduce himself.

Once again, he was surprised by how well he seemed to be fitting into this world, when the three dogs took to him quite happily. Clark wondered whether even his scent actually matched that of Dean Cain? He brought the dogs inside and fed them, then settled down in the living room.

Clark had realised that he knew next to nothing about this world that he was supposed to fit into, but being the journalist that he was, he

figured the best way to find out quickly about this world, without revealing who he was to the world, was to watch LNN news.

At first he was confused when he couldn't find that station, but it slowly dawned on him, as he settled down to watch CNN news that if there was no Superman native to this universe, perhaps there was no Luthor empire either!

Wondering what other differences he would stumble across, Clark made himself comfortable again, floating mid air before the TV, and settled in for the evening.

The next thing Clark knew, the doorbell was ringing stridently, and he fell to the floor in surprise.

'Well, Tempus did say I'd be picked up to get to the studio tomorrow, today. Wonder who my lift is?'

Muzzily scrubbing at his face, he headed down to the front door, and opened it to...

"Lois?! You've cut-" Suddenly realising his mistake, Clark realised that this must be the actress playing Lois for the show, and that she had cut her hair!

"Dean! I said seven, and I thought you'd be ready. I'm only doing this as favour to you since you smashed your car - again! You knew we were starting late today, but I really thought...!"

Backing away from the door, mumbling that he'd be ready in a few moments, he headed for the bathroom. Suddenly he realised that just because he knew the name of the guy he was supposed to be, didn't mean he knew anything else about this job he was supposed to be filling. Leaving the house so fast that no-one would see him, he grabbed a few more tabloid magazines from the first newsstand he could find and headed back to the house again. One of the advantages of being Superman was that he was able to speed read the magazines while showering and shaving, and he quickly learned that the woman who looked so much like Lois had the most downloaded image on the Internet. He was shocked to find a copy of the picture in one of the magazines: she was wearing nothing but his cape! Still, maybe she would be a good confidante, if only he could figure out how to tell her. 'Geez,' thought Clark with irony as he quickly dressed for work. 'First I have to figure out how to tell Lois who I am; and now I have to figure out how to tell Ms Teri Hatcher not only who I am, but make her believe it too!'

Only a few minutes had passed when Clark emerged from the bathroom, wearing a black t-shirt and jeans, and a leather jacket which apparently he and Dean shared, to find Teri still standing in the front doorway. She obviously appreciated the way he was dressed, from the way her eyes surreptitiously travelled up and down his body. Clark was taken back to the first time Lois had arrived at his hotel to pick him up, shortly after he had arrived in Metropolis, and had found him just out of the shower. Even her words were similar, only that time she had stumbled over the "nine o'clock"...

Chapter Three

Luckily for Dean, although the cab driver looked questioningly at

Superman needing a lift to Lois' apartment, he easily accepted his explanation that he was a double for Superman, and had been doing some publicity shots at the Daily Planet. Unfortunately, he was also a talkative cabbie and he insisted on "reminding" Dean of the time when he had been rescued from the traffic jam to end all traffic jams, by clearing the streets only a few weeks ago. Upon accepting the fare (which left little change out of Jimmy's twenty dollars), he left Dean with some sage advice: if he was going to be trying to double for Superman, he really needed to be up to date on Superman's latest feats, otherwise even his vaguely similar looks wouldn't help him out!

Unsure when he would next get to his gym to do a workout, Dean chose to climb the stairs to Lois' fifth floor apartment instead of taking the elevator. He chuckled to himself, as he climbed the stairs, that the cabbie thought he only looked vaguely similar to Superman; Dean also wondered whether he really did look all that similar to the character he portrayed on a daily basis. 'Not to worry, I'm sure Lois will be able to tell me if I'm doing anything wrong here,' he thought as he knocked on the door.

There was a pause and then he heard Lois move slowly to the door.

"Who is it?" she called.

"It's - ah," quickly Dean thought, 'well, she knows anyway, and Clark is supposed to want her to treat him as Clark rather than Superman.' "Lois, it's me. I just wanted to check up on you."

Dean heard the multiple locks on the door being opened, and then, standing before him, looking very surprised to see him, was Lois Lane! "Cla - Superman?? Wh - I mean, I thought - er, hang on a moment, I thought Clark was here? I thought I heard his voice at the door? And why are you at the door, instead of the window? What's going on here?"

'Oh no!' Dean thought. 'I misjudged! She doesn't know yet and now I've let the cat out of the bag! HELP!'

Lois had opened the door wide enough for Dean to get into the room, so he took advantage of that to get in quickly and close the door before Lois' babbling let the whole world in on the secret. By then, Lois had begun to think of explanations for what she had just learned.

"Wait, it's kryptonite again isn't it? You've lost your powers and come to me for help? Superman? Or maybe somehow you've switched bodies with Clark and you've come to me for help? But why would you do that? And how is that possible? It couldn't be that..."

"Lois." Dean tried to interject into her babble.

"Lois!" He tried again to get her attention. Having made an enormous blunder, Dean realised that to stop himself from making any more he would need help. He had to make the best of a bad situation and enlist Lois' help until he could figure out the machine and get out of here!

"LOIS! Stop!"

Lois closed her mouth quite abruptly and looked at Dean. She was surprised that Superman would raise his voice at her (or was it Clark who was shouting? - at any rate, neither of them usually did that! she babbled to herself). She gestured towards the sofa, indicating that her guest (whoever he was) should take a seat.

Dean, in the meantime, was trying to figure out how to explain the situation he was in to Lois, which gave the woman a moment to take a breath and stand up again, head for the kitchen, and offer to make a drink.

"Lois," began Dean tentatively. "I'm not who you think I am. No matter what you think, I'm not Superman. And, I apologise, but despite what you thought you heard through your door, I'm not Clark Kent either. I hope you will hear me out though, and help me too. I really didn't know who else to turn to.

"But... you sounded - you do sound like Clark. And you look so much like Superman? What is going on?"

"I know you and Clark have been through quite a lot in the last few days. I know, you're wondering how I could possibly know. Wait, and I'll try to explain as best I can. Tell me, did Clark mention anything in the past few days about a diary? One the blackmailer had?"

"How did you know about the blackmailer? No-one knew about that except me!"

"Wait, Lois... I'm trying to tell you, but I also don't quite know where to start. Um, let me try again. Has Superman ever mentioned someone called Tempus to you? Have you ever met HG Wells?"

"No, and no. That's ridiculous! How could I possibly have met HG Wells? Time travel? Ha!... wait a moment though, Tempus, that name sounds familiar. Well, of course, it does have to do with time travel doesn't it? I'm getting the weirdest sense of deja vu here...

"Hang on a moment, Mister. If you aren't Superman, then who are you? What am I supposed to call you?"

Dean realised that he was so used to being well-known that he had forgotten to introduce himself to the beautiful woman before him! He told her his name, then began again, trying to explain.

"Let me start again. You may not believe this - hell, I don't think I believe this! - I'm an actor. I play the part of Superman in a TV show. I know, there probably isn't any such TV show here. But here's the unbelievable bit. I'm from somewhere else. I don't really know how to explain it. It's sort of like time travel, but it's more like, um, dimensional travel. I was kidnapped today by someone I thought I knew. But it wasn't the guy I knew, it was someone from here, but from a future of here, who doesn't much like Superman, and he must have kidnapped the real Clark and taken him back to my dimension. So you see, I need your help to get back home and to get Clark back here."

"Hang on, hang on a moment, um, Dean? Right?" Lois interrupted. "Let me get this straight." She thought to herself, 'what he's saying then

is that in his home dimension, he's an actor in a TV show about me? And that he plays Superman in this show, and that he also plays Clark? But how is that possible?' Then the light dawned, and Lois reacted.

"NO! Do you mean to tell me that Clark is Superman??"

Chapter Four

Clark spent much of the next half hour or so trying out different scenarios in his mind, trying to work out what to say to Ms Hatcher to explain to her who he really was. For her part, Teri was quiet and introspective for most of the drive, glancing at him and almost beginning to speak a few times, but then stopping, as if she, too, didn't quite know how to say whatever was on her mind. But then, they arrived at the studios and it appeared that his opportunity to tell her had been lost, as various crew members, make-up artists and hairdressers appeared and bundled her away to her trailer.

Clark had seen movie sets in the past, and had a vague idea of what to do to look like he was fitting in, so he quickly located his own trailer and found the daily schedule which would tell him what scenes he was supposed to be filming first, and what the general daily routine would be.

Speed reading through today's script to learn his lines, he couldn't get over the way it was so obvious in the script that everyone knew that Clark was Superman! This would truly turn into a novel experience for him! One thing that really cheered him up, however, was the realisation that according to the current episode being filmed, it was apparent that Lois knew the secret too. In a way, Clark could see this as a trial for when he got back home, to learn how Lois might actually respond to the knowledge!

"Hey Dean! Where did you get to? You're up in just a few minutes." The words came from a stranger who seemed to be in control of the emerging chaos around him. "You and Teri have a flying scene - you are going to need to get into the suit and get to Make-up. We need you back in 30 minutes."

"Yeah, right, Make-up," mumbled Clark, still totally confused by the scenes around him. "Teri, over here!" yelled the stranger. Clark watched as "Lois" hurried off. Of course, he reminded himself, it wasn't "his" Lois. It certainly looked like her and sounded like her, but...

"You ready, Teri? Its a cable scene today - tough one too. Dean promised he would work out specially for today; said he won't drop you!"

"Hrmph," was the reply Clark heard. "Well, let's just get this one going. I'm not up for a 14 hour day today."

"Dean..." Teri looked at him suspiciously. "Is my dress crooked, lipstick smudged... what?"

"Sorry," Clark backpedalled. "It's just... umm... I have to get changed. See you in half an hour!" Clark turned and almost ran from the "set". He had to get away - get to make-up, wherever that was. He had to get the suit on... hang on, he checked... he had the suit on.

He was Superman. OK, one detail taken care of. Now, make-up? Why did he need makeup to be Superman? He realised though, that being on film, he would need makeup, so he scanned the area till he found a trailer marked with the appropriate signs and headed in that direction. He took his time, and used some of the half hour to do some further exploring. The changing to Superman bit would require little effort. He walked through what he discovered was the Warner Brothers Film Studios. He was greeted everywhere he went; he discovered that this "Dean" person was well known and a popular figure in this world - well in the film studio at least.

After about twenty minutes, he thought it wise to return to the set and make an appearance at this make-up place. He knew that he was supposed to be Superman the next time he made an appearance - obviously there was no need for an actor portraying a superhero to have a secret identity. Stepping into a corner and out of sight, Clark executed a spin change into his alter-ego. He became aware of a heated discussion in the Daily Planet between Teri and the director. "What do you mean he's wandering around the lot?" Teri questioned. "He knows that I wanted to be out of here early tonight! Now he needs to take the visitors' tour? Of all the..." Clark decided that now might be an opportune time to make his presence known. He strolled up to Teri, desperately wanting to assure her that he would not dream of being whatever she was about to label him.

"Lo... um, Teri? What's the problem?"

"Enjoy your little tour?" She queried, with her back to him still. "We're all ready to rehearse this scene and you're ... when did you get changed?" Teri changed tack when she turned and noticed Clark in the suit. "Oh, never mind. Can we just get to work?"

Clark shot Teri a bemused grin. This might not be "his" Lois, but this lady certainly acted and sounded like her. She reminded him of Lois when Clark first joined The Planet: sarcastic, uncompromising, driven and virtually totally ignorant of his presence - it was nothing more than an annoying necessity of circumstance.

The director called to Clark and Teri. "Okay people, this is a more complicated scene than usual. Dean, we need to hook up the harness a little differently to get the angles right. We are using a different type of cable, which is supposed to give a more realistic effect on camera. We will test them with you and then get you to hold Teri before we get to dialogue or anything else. Got it?"

"Uh huh," they both murmured simultaneously. Clark looked around and caught sight of the "harness." He started somewhat when he saw the complexity of the rig required to make him "fly". His actions must have betrayed him, because Teri was looking at him strangely. "Dean?" she queried. "Are you worried about going up there today? I know you are not fond of the usual harness, but this one is supposed to be less demanding."

Her tones indicated that she knew that pretending to fly was not particularly easy and Clark gathered that his counterpart was not exactly excited about being suspended in mid-air on a regular basis. "What? No, um, it's ... OK. I was just checking out the new cables. There just seems to be lots of wires and cables."

"Of course there are Dean," Teri responded with mirth. "What did you

expect, skyhooks?" This woman certainly had the wry humour of Lois.

The director called Clark over to be fitted into the contraption. He felt totally ridiculous, but decided to go along with the charade. How would he explain things otherwise? In his own world he was different, a freak, but at least there he existed. Here, he was just a fantasy, a concept dreamed up in someone's imagination. No, now was not the time to declare his hand, but he was going to have to do something, at some stage to work out a way of returning to his world.

"Put your arms in here, clip this under the cape. Now as you are elevated, you will need to stretch out horizontally. We'll make it look like you're doing the flying if you follow our directions."

Clark felt the tug of the cables as his feet began to lift off the floor. He struggled to avoid using his own powers to fly - it was difficult as his natural response to being in the air was to be self-sufficient. "Now stretch out ... horizontally ... put your left arm out, clench your fist, roll to the side ... no the other side. Now we are going to bring you to an upright position and then lower you slowly. Good ... hold that, straighter ... now soft landing, great!"

Five minutes later Clark was back on the ground. He had managed to control his natural urge to be under his own steam, well for most of the time. He was certain that no-one would have noticed him compensating for some of the awkward manoeuvrings of the harness operator.

"That was great, Dean! The smoothest we have seen you "fly" in a long time! Must be the new equipment." Clark grinned widely. "Must be," he agreed.

"Teri, over here. We need to do a test run with you and Dean together now," the director motioned. "Okay, Dean, I want you to rise up holding Teri, to stop and talk with her for a minute or two, then we need to get you into the horizontal position and test some scenery shots behind you. We will need you up there for about fifteen minutes. Is that okay with you two? Think you can handle it Dean?"

"Um, yeah, no problems," replied Clark, cheerfully. He looked at Teri who was eyeing him suspiciously. "What, no complaints today, no headaches?" She queried. "You must be sick!"

Clark wondered about this Dean character; was he a bit of a whiner, or was it really hard work being suspended by wires for hours at a time. He, Clark, would never really know, he mused. "Um, no, Lo - ah, Teri, I'm fine. He really did need to be careful. This was at least the third time he had called her Lois, or nearly had, and this lady was certainly no airhead. She and Dean obviously spent a considerable amount of time together and she knew him quite well. But how well? He still hadn't worked that out. There had been a reference to a 'Jon' that he had yet to decipher. He needed to find some more tabloids!

The ropes of the harness were realigned and checked and Teri directed

to take her place in Clark's arms. This was difficult - here was the exact replica of the woman he loved in his arms, and it was "Lois" but only a caricature of her. She was an actor portraying Lois. Teri's proximity only served to confuse him even further.

"Now, we are not going too high on this one, there is no harness on Teri so we are not risking anything here. Dean hold tight - that's a precious cargo you have there!" The directions were coming thick and fast. Clark felt the pressure of the cables once again, and he and Teri began to rise. "Hold on tight, you hear me, Wonderboy," cracked Teri, betraying a slight nervousness, as they rose slowly together. Teri had her arms linked around Clark's neck and he had one arm around her waist and one pointing into the air.

"Can you do this safely with one arm holding me?" She queried, "You only do this when I'm in a harness!" Clark detected a slight sense of panic in Teri's voice and brought his other arm to meet behind Teri's back. He felt her relax slightly. "You seem almost overconfident today, Dean. What's up? You almost look like you are enjoying this - that would be a first!"

"Well, maybe I am finally getting used to it all; it's been, what, how long now?" The question was a clever one, with the dual purpose of dealing with Teri's question and trying to glean a little more information about his own history in this world.

"Three and half years, Dean and I remember you telling me repeatedly that you would never get used to this. What gives?"

The woman was pressing against him now, and he began to feel decidedly uncomfortable - her closeness being a huge part of the problem. Teri was an actor, this was all an act for her, but for Clark, his relationship with Lois was real and she could not help but affect him.

"Dean, you are blushing! What's the matter? You have been acting strangely since early morning. I can't put a finger on it, but somehow you are different."

"Well, um... it's..." Clark started to respond, but they were interrupted by the director.

"Okay people, that's good. Now we want to get Dean into the horizontal position, just get ready to brace yourself. I only need you to hold that for a few minutes. Just wait for the cables to be realigned."

They both felt a jerk in the ropes above them. "Whoa! Oh shit!" They heard a voice above them becoming agitated and then suddenly felt themselves being hurled skyward. The studio was in a warehouse-like building with very high ceilings, but they were approaching the top of the cable with alarming speed.

Chapter Five

"Wait! I have to explain something, Ms Lane," interrupted Dean. If this Lois Lane was anything like the one his partner was used to playing, he had to get a word in edgewise here before she started babbling uncontrollably.

"Somehow (I really don't understand how this works), some of what you have experienced as real life, I have acted out on my TV show. I knew about the blackmailers and Jason Mazik & the diary of Tempus because that story was our second season finale. I would like to avoid telling you anything about your future, but for all I know, my being here is going to change your future from episodes in your life that I've already been in, so maybe it won't make any difference anyway.

"You see, at the very end of our second season, after Lois has - er, you have recovered from the effects of being frozen and thawed, she goes for a walk in Centennial Park with Clark. And he proposes to her. We didn't know how she - er, you - were going to react, so we actually filmed three different endings for that episode."

"Well, gee! I don't know how I would react either. But if Clark tried proposing to me, and kept a secret like the fact that he's Superman, too, from me, one thing I do know is that I'd be -"

"Mad?" Dean spoke the word at the same time as Lois.

"Yes, mad, very mad! How could you - I mean, he, expect me to agree to spend my whole life with him, if I didn't know everything about him?"

"Now wait a moment," Dean interrupted again, "I'm not married, but I do know that you don't necessarily know everything about a person before you marry them. That's part of what a marriage is about: learning about each other intimately."

"Intimately?"

"Well, yes. I mean, well, maybe Clark did make a mistake in not telling you first, but well, it has certainly led to some interesting conversations as a result. I mean, it will for you. I mean - oh hell, I don't know what I mean! Anyway don't you remember? Hasn't Clark been trying to tell you something really really important these last few weeks, but he keeps getting called away. Argh! these tenses are getting so confusing! I don't know what will be in his mind when he proposes to you before telling you the secret. I think if I had truly been in his position, I would have done the easier thing first - proposed, that is, and planned on telling you the secret straight afterward. But I can tell you that in my universe's version of this story, you already knew already anyway."

"Excuse me? I'm getting confused. You're saying that Clark will propose to me without telling me he's Superman, but that I already know? Well, I certainly know now! And what was that about having filmed different endings to the season finale?"

Dean explained, haltingly, and mixing his tenses wildly, how the writers had allowed for three different endings to the season finale, where in one, Lois had said yes, in another she had said no and in the third she had not said anything, but just looked surprised.

"But then how did you know that I knew Clark's secret?" Lois asked. She seemed to have realised that she had to take this whole series of events in her stride. Perhaps later she would have a moment to go gibberingly mad over the whole thing.

"We've already started filming the fourth season, Lois," explained Dean. "I already know what your response is going to be. I think that's what I meant when I said that this is sort of like time travel, as well as dimensional travel. I know that when you tell Clark that you can't marry him yet because the revelation is a bit too much of a hurdle for you, he is going to get all pouty and upset. He's not quite like me, because when you say 'No, not yet,' he'll only hear the "no" and ignore the "not yet".

"What do you mean, "he's not quite like you"? You two certainly look the same! And believe me," Lois admitted, "I've done some looking." Suddenly she blushed at this confession.

Being the TV star he was, Dean was used to being ogled by women, but this was different. He was used to working with Teri Hatcher, who was considered (on his world, at least) one of the world's sexiest women. But Teri was married, and was therefore off-limits. Lois Lane, on the other hand, was neither married, nor he suspected, if he really pushed, off limits. 'This could get interesting,' said a small part of his brain. 'Shaddap,' he told that part of his brain. 'This woman has just had a series of shocks to her system, and she doesn't need that sort of treatment!'

"That reminds me Lois, something I wanted to ask you..." Dean broke off there. He had been about to ask Lois what it was like to actually have super powers, but he quickly realised that Ultra-Woman was in this Lois' future, and he really didn't want to spoil everything for her. He had to change tacks fast!

"Um, would you like to see my time-machine?" He groaned aloud at the way that line sounded.

"Is there a problem, Dean?" Lois was concerned now.

Dean grinned disarmingly at Lois. "Why is it that when I'm writing scripts for this show, I never have difficulty writing for these characters, I feel like I understand them, but when I'm actually supposed to be Clark, I sound so corny?"

"Hang on a moment, I thought you said you were an actor?"

"Well, yes, but I'm also a writer and I want to get into directing, and I've actually written two scripts for 'Lois & Clark' that have been produced."

"'Lois and Clark,' eh? That's what the show is called? Not just 'Superman'? I like the sound of that!" Lois smiled.

"Well," explained Dean, the show is supposed to be about the relationship between the two of us, er... I mean you, I mean..."

"Don't worry, I think I understand." Lois interrupted. "So, we actually do have a relationship, do we?" To Dean's surprise, Lois put her hand on his knee.

"Um, Lois?!" his voice broke disconcertingly. "What are you doing? I've just told you that you're going to be proposed to by Clark, and that you guys are supposed to be having a rel- relationship," he

stuttered, "and you - you do understand I'm not him, don't you?"

Lois, for her part, was feeling quite dazed. The doctors had given her some medication since she had been snap frozen and thawed, and the pills were having quite an effect on her. She found her mind going off on all sorts of odd tangents. She wondered to herself whether this Dean person was as like Superman and Clark as he appeared. She wondered whether Clark (her Clark, she thought with a mental giggle) had given any thought to sex with her, and whether making love with him would be different for her than it was with a human. Whether he planned to prepare her for this, or if she was just supposed to find out on her wedding night? She wondered to herself whether or not the suit would or could come off. Then she noticed that Clark ... er... Dean, she corrected herself, was looking at her with those puppy dog eyes that both men shared, and that he seemed quite concerned, waiting for her response.

"Sure I do, Honey," Despite the little thrill that went through him at being called Honey by someone as beautiful and sexy as Lois was, Dean suddenly noticed that Lois' voice was slurred; she almost sounded a little like Teri playing Wanda Detroit. "But I've always wondered how that suit comes off, and what it would be like to make love to Superman, and you're about the closest I'm likely to get, right?"

"No! No, wait! Lois, this isn't right!" Dean jumped up off the sofa, and moved swiftly to the other side of the room. Lois slumped down into the sofa as soon as her support was gone. Dean moved back to her again, and helped her up. Sitting on his heels before her, he looked at her carefully, and realised that there was something wrong. "Lois? Are you alright?"

She stared at him vacantly, and not quite knowing what to do, he found her bathroom (thinking to himself, 'Ah, this place really does have a bathroom, does it?') and went to wet a face cloth to help bring Lois to her senses. On the cabinet, Dean noticed a bottle of pills and looking more closely at the label, realised that Lois must have taken some of these drugs. "Lois?" He called from the bathroom.

"Wh..." she murmured.

Coming back out into the living room with the damp face cloth, Dean asked Lois what the pills were. The face cloth helped to make her a little more alert and she explained that the doctors had given her the drugs, but that given what had happened, they weren't entirely sure how she would react to them. Suddenly she realised what she had been doing, and sat up straighter.

"Oh god, oh god, I didn't imagine that did I? I really was coming onto you a bit strong, wasn't I, Dean? Oh god, I'm so sorry. I guess these drugs have taken away my inhibitions! Oh god, I didn't say that out loud, did I?"

"Lois," interrupted Dean. "Don't worry about it. You obviously need to rest. Why don't you go lie down till you're feeling a bit better and then we can work out what I'm going to do with myself."

Lois looked at Dean, sitting there in the Superman suit, and realised

that he had come to her, because he simply didn't know where else to turn. It made her feel as caring (maternal? she thought with a small surprise) as she had ever felt in her life. Something about Clark/Superman/Dean seemed to bring that out in her, she supposed.

"Sure. Why don't you, um, make yourself at home here. Fix yourself something to eat. These drugs are really getting to me. I don't know how long I'm going to sleep for, but I feel tired enough to sleep forever. I'll get you a spare pillow, and you can sleep too if you want."

Dean looked at Lois questioningly, and she started, realising what the look meant. "On the sofa! On the sofa!"

'Darn!' thought Dean, with a grin to himself.

Late in the night, Dean woke, again, just after drifting off. He wasn't sleeping well, and the knowledge that he had to be lucid the next day wasn't helping. "Damn!" he swore softly, punching his pillow again. His body was so aware of the beautiful woman asleep in the bedroom, and he knew it wasn't right to do what he was considering, but he found himself getting up, and padding barefoot from the living room to Lois' room. 'I'm just checking up on her,' he tried to convince himself. But when he saw her asleep in that bed, totally dead to the world, he found the temptation of the bed (not the woman!) too great. 'I'm so tired, that I'm sure to sleep like a log too. It won't disturb her sleep if I just lie on top of the covers, surely!' Almost without thought, he found himself lying next to Lois, and drifting off to sleep. His last conscious thought was something along the lines of 'If my friends could see me now!'

Chapter Six

"Dean!" screamed Teri. "What's happening?" They could hear people screaming and shouting below them. It was obvious that the whole contraption was out of control. Then just as suddenly as the upward movement had begun, it stopped. Teri looked at Clark and with an expression of sheer relief buried her head in his shoulder. She sobbed audibly. "That was not fun," she whispered. "Please hold on till they get us down from here."

"My pleasure," replied Clark, almost a little too quickly. Having decided to keep his true identity a secret, he was surprised at how quickly his deception had almost ended!

He was now suspending them in the air, the harness still attached, but the ropes not supporting his body. To the observers below, the cable failsafe mechanism had saved them. However the operator of the harness knew differently. He had been unable to control the upward journey and was amazed when the pair had stopped their ascent. He could also see the slackness in the cable above them. Those two were being suspended in the air by something other than that new, wonderfully unique cable.

Clark was concerned about the harness anyway after the almost-emergency, and took the opportunity of Teri not looking to have a closer look. What he saw horrified him. The entire rope system was under too much sudden stress and was about to fail. How could he get out of this with no-one the wiser to his identity?

Fate came to his aid, for as the harness ropes began to split and separate, one of the counter-weights attached to the end of one of the ropes swung suddenly upwards. The only technician near enough to see what was actually happening up there, took the brunt of the flying counter-weight and was knocked from his platform 10 feet in the air down to the sound-stage floor! Clark was able to secretly use his powers to cushion the man's impact in such a way that when he landed it was gently and onto a pile of unused ropes, so that the landing was not as bad as it might otherwise have been. Then mechanism housing the pulley system at the top of the cable decided that it's job was complete, and as all the ropes in pulleys raced down to follow the technician, Clark realised that he was the only thing between Teri Hatcher and a similar demise! He had no choice but to use his powers to save her, and so, hoping that in the confusion that was occurring down below no-one would think to ask how the rescue was achieved, he flew himself and Teri to the lately evacuated platform.

As he deposited Teri on her feet, and indicated that they should climb the ladder down to the sound-stage floor, he watched the emotions playing over her face, so clearly. She moved from bafflement to disbelief to wonder. Clark could almost see Teri's brain ticking over. Neither of them said a word about what had just occurred. As they neared the ground, Clark and Teri became aware of the situation down there. The technician had been surrounded by medical officers. Despite his soft(ish) landing, the man was unconscious. Clark checked him out and found no concussion, and realised that the man must have fainted! The baffled doctors came to much the same conclusion but suggested that he should be taken to a nearby hospital for observation until at least the next day.

By then, Clark and Teri had reached the floor, and they were approached by another medical officer. Teri appeared to be in shock; she was pale and her hands were shaking. Although the doctors could not find anything specific wrong with her, they suggested to the director and crew that given that the harness was unusable until it could be repaired, and that call-sheet for the remainder of the day required only flying scenes, which meant that the whole day was a write-off, Teri and "Dean" should also be given the rest of the day off.

Clark offered to drive Teri back to her home, and quietly led her towards his trailer, where he could get out of the costume and back into Dean's clothes.

As soon as they were out of earshot of the rest of the crew, Teri placed a restraining hand on Clark's arm.

"What happened back there...? Did I imagine it in the confusion?"

Stalling for time, Clark replied with a question of his own. "What did you think happened up there, Teri?"

Teri paused, trying to find the right words to describe something which she had always known was impossible.

"You... you aren't who I thought you were, are you? You've been behaving oddly all day. What is going on here?"

Clark realised that he needed to come clean at least to this one person, with whom he was going to have to be working rather closely.

"You're right. I'm not Dean Cain," he began bluntly, hoping to get this revelation (at least) over as quickly as possible. He declared quietly, "I'm Superman."

"Ohmigod!" Teri gasped, and promptly reacted to all the shocks of the day by fainting.

Chapter Seven

Much later, Lois began to drift towards consciousness, aware of another warm body beside hers. Still fuzzy-minded because of the drugs, she glanced over to see who was there, and was most pleasantly surprised to find Superman sleeping soundly next to her, wearing not much more than his underwear. She didn't recall much of the previous night's events at first, and couldn't believe her luck! She decided that didn't want to know what he was doing there, but she couldn't resist the opportunity to kiss him lightly on the forehead.

Dean turned over with a mumble too low to decipher and, much to Lois' delight, he wrapped her in his arms, and fell deeper asleep. Lois had no idea what was going on, but she was thrilled. Her body began to betray her and she couldn't resist snuggling up closer to the man of her dreams. Wrapped in a man's arms for the first time in many years, her body still knew what to do and began to respond to his warmth and presence. But the drugs were still in control of her body. Soon Lois, comforted and contented, drifted off to sleep again.

Eventually the night began to turn to day, and with the first sounds of traffic, on the street outside, Dean began to awaken. He was so surprised to find himself cuddled up close to Lois that he sat up, startling Lois into wakefulness too.

"Wha -?!" they both exclaimed at the same time. Dean grabbed for the sheets to cover himself just as Lois did the same thing.

The events of the previous afternoon and evening rushed back into Lois' mind with a forcefulness that made her shut her eyes and hold her temples.

"Lois? Are you alright?" Dean was worried.

"I'm fine." She was short-tempered because of the headache she just knew was about to attack her. "Dean, isn't it? You wouldn't believe the dream I had last night."

"Actually, Lois, given what's been happening to me recently, I think I would."

Getting off the bed, Dean went to the bathroom and came back with some Tylenol and a glass of water. Lois looked at him gratefully, before swallowing the medicine in one gulp. Then she motioned that he should leave the room to let her get dressed. Dean headed back to the living room and was standing looking at his suit with distaste, wondering what he should do about getting some clean clothes, when Lois followed him out there, now in her schlumpy robe, and realised

what he was thinking.

"Well, first things first, I guess we have to get you some clothes to wear, since you aren't Superman, Dean. I can get into Clark's apartment and get some clothes for you, but I don't think you should be seen in public until I get out there and back. While I'm gone, you'd better call Perry and tell him that neither of us can make it into the office today?"

"Wait, Lois, what are we going to be doing today then? Can you take time off work that easily?"

"Oh, that's not a problem. I'm due a lot of holiday - I just never seem to need to take time off, and Perry's been on my back about that recently, so I don't think he'll mind if I don't turn up today. As for what we're going to do, well, I thought you wanted some help getting home? And I know I want to see Superman back where he belongs!"

"And Clark too, I suppose?"

"What, does everyone on your planet read minds?"

"Well, not really. But it was fairly obvious which way your mind was headed, Lois."

"Anyway, Dean, my plan for getting you back where you belong hinges mainly on working out how the machine works that brought you here. You - er Superman, that is, told me that you had kept the plans for the machine that he drew up in a safe place. You wouldn't happen to know where that might be, since you know him so well?"

"The plans? You mean you expect them to actually work?" Dean was very surprised.

"Well? And why not?" Lois was bemused. "The machine that brought you here worked didn't it? Why shouldn't it work again, once we understand how to control it?"

"But the machine is only a prop," Dean explained. "How can it possibly work? It isn't real!"

"Not on this world, Dean... It must be very strange on your world, but here, we don't have to understand how everything works, we just accept it."

"Hmm," mused Dean. "I suppose you're right. In my world, we wouldn't accept a person walking around in this suit," he touched the spandex suit on the sofa, "let alone flying around in it!"

"Speaking of which, I'm sure you don't want to sit around in your underwear all day. I'll go get you some of Clark's clothes, and we'll get to work on getting you home, eh?"

"Um, yeah. While you're out, I'll cook us some breakfast and ring Perry." Dean wondered where he might find the number for the Planet, but assumed that he'd be able to find it somewhere.

"Cook? Breakfast? Wow! what a treat!" Lois thought that this man may not have been her Superman or the Clark she knew so well, but he

certainly was talented! "If you know the way Clark thinks so well, you might also like to think about where Clark may have stored the plans, too."

With that Lois headed for the bathroom and a quick shower before leaving for Clark's apartment.

While Lois was gone, Dean took the opportunity to look around Lois' place. He knew that even if he couldn't make Teri believe what was happening to him, he'd still be able to offer some very useful input into her character depiction, even if it was only in the next episode he wrote for the series. He was fascinated to learn what Lois' interests were in music. And he smiled broadly when he discovered her stash of basic cookbooks. It had always surprised him that Lois, knowing her weakness in this area, didn't appear to have done anything to gain more skill in the kitchen. Maybe she was just waiting for the right man to cook for! In the kitchen, he also found that the pantry was well stocked, as was the refrigerator, so he had no problems making a healthy and filling breakfast for two.

Given the schedule he'd been keeping at home, he decided to treat this time as a bit of holiday, and despite the need to get home hanging over his head, he thought he would take it easy.

As Dean wandered through the apartment, he suddenly remembered that he was supposed to call Perry. He couldn't find the number anywhere, and ended up having to call Information to be able to call the place he supposedly worked! But once that was out of the way, his thoughts turned to wondering where Clark would have hidden the plans to the time machine which he had built. Nothing had been said about a hiding place in the script that Dean had read from, but then suddenly it clicked! A hiding place? Of course! The secret compartment in his wardrobe. Where else would he have put it?

Dean called The Planet again, and got Lois' mobile number and then called her, catching her just as she was about to leave Clark's place.

"Lois, go back into Clark's room and open the wardrobe. See the tie rack there? Remember what you told me about what I consider to be props actually working here? Pull down on the tie rack."

"Oh my god!"

"Lois? What is it?"

"It's just..." Lois was momentarily lost for words, an amazing thing for Dean to witness, even by phone. "Well, if I ever needed proof that you were telling the truth about Clark and Superman being the same person, here it is! I can't believe that he'd keep these suits here!"

"Lois! Lois!" Dean interrupted to stem the babbling before it really took off. "I need you to look around in there to find the plans for the time machine. That's the only place apart from maybe Kansas that I can think of the Superman might hide them!"

"Kansas? Why would Superman hide anything in Kansas?"

"Smallville, Kansas, Lois... where his parents live - you know?"

"Oh my god! You mean that Jonathon and Martha Kent are also from Krypton?"

"Lois, no! Wait. Come back here when you find the plans and I'll tell you what I can."

By this point, Dean just wanted to work on getting home. He was pretty much unconcerned about changing what would be the future for Lois, making it different from what he and Teri had played out in script form all those months ago. 'And anyhow,' that voice in his mind told him, 'you don't really know how much Lois was supposed to know, only that she had figured out - or been told - the secret before Clark got the chance to tell her before proposing to her.'

Dean's thoughts were interrupted by Lois's discovery of the plans that Clark had indeed hidden in the secret section of his closet.

"Dean? I don't know about this... these plans look awfully complicated. I don't know whether we'll be able to build this machine by ourselves. Do you think we should get some help from Dr Klein at STAR Labs?"

"Lois, no, I'd rather not get anyone else involved in this unless I have to. I don't want to change your future or anything like that. I don't think Dr Klein knows the secret - at least not at this stage. But don't worry anyway. I have my machine here - I just don't know how to use it!"

"You have it here? Where?"

"I hid it in the alley-way behind the Daily Planet when I arrived. I'm hoping the plans will also have instructions on how to work it and how to set it so I can get back to my place again!"

Lois told Dean she would be back at her apartment with the clean clothes and the plans as soon as she could, and hung up the phone.

Chapter Eight

Superman caught Teri before she hit the ground, and, not knowing quite where else to go with her, took her back to Dean's place. The fresh breeze as he flew began to revive her, and she woke totally just as he was landing at the back door of the house. The dogs barked a welcome to the two of them (apparently Teri was a known quantity to them, though she wasn't really to Clark); apparently they were quite unsurprised at this flying man's abilities.

As Teri's mind began to throw off the dizziness from her surprise, her eyes widened and she looked at the man who had just brought her here.

"You're Superman? You're Superman! I don't believe it!"

"Well, I wasn't quite sure how to prove it to you, but I don't see how you can not believe it Ms Hatcher."

"Teri," she murmured absently.

"Teri," Clark took that as permission, "I need your help."

"You need my help?" Teri was honestly surprised that someone who could apparently fly and was able to do all those things that Superman supposedly could, would need anybody's help to accomplish anything. But then she thought, 'Maybe he isn't so Super after all? Maybe our writers have been more accurate than they could possibly know, and he is more human than he knows. He certainly looks rather lost. I wonder what happened to Dean?'

"I don't believe it!" Teri repeated out loud. "I don't believe that I believe what is happening here! Where's Dean Cain?"

"I don't know, Teri. Tempus told me that he'd taken Dean to my home, but I have my doubts about his trustworthiness, so I don't know for sure where Dean is."

"Tempus? How long have you been here? Maybe you'd better tell me how this happened. And then I think we need to work on a way to send you home again, don't you think?"

Clark noticed from the way she spoke that Teri had already begun to believe him - or at least had suspended her disbelief long enough to help him out.

Teri was thinking something along those lines to herself: 'If I can get rid of this person quickly, I'll have the rest of the day to collapse in a jibbering heap!'

She gestured to him to take a seat and almost fell into the sofa herself when, with a grin, Superman chose to float instead, in a sitting position.

Clark described to Teri how he had spent the past 24 hours (he couldn't believe it had only been 24! It seemed so much had happened in such a short space of time!), and then turned to her and asked:

"Teri, from what I've seen around at the set and in the tabloids I scanned this morning, it seems to me that a lot of what really happened to me has been played out in that TV studio. I don't understand how this is possible... I think Tempus even mentioned something about choosing Mr Cain - er, Dean - to play me because he looked so much like me - But can you tell me something?

"In the scenes we were filming today, it seemed that "Lois" knew my secret. How does she learn it?"

"You mean you don't know? That's really weird, because you're right, it does seem like our writers have some sort of psychic connection to your world - I'm also not sure about what Tempus said to you though - but I remember discussing this with the writers when 'Clark' proposed to 'Lois' at the end of our second season, and going into our third. I wasn't terribly happy with the way 'Lois' suddenly knew, and the audience didn't get to see her reactions to her discovery. I think they messed up there a bit, and should have shown more of 'Lois'' discovery, and I know a lot of the fans felt that way, at the time,

too. They said that it was because of the way both 'Clark' and 'Superman' touched 'Lois'' face," she demonstrated for him, sending a chill down Clark's spine. "But I think that if I had believed that 'Lois' was a real person, there would have been more to her discovery than that. But our writers weren't able to tap into the psychic network or something," she giggled, embarrassed, "and so that's what they left us with by way of explanation."

"So Lois does know by the time I propose to her. Phew!" Clark sighed in relief. "I've been trying to figure out how to tell her, somehow that won't make her angry at me, but I can't do it. I keep on almost telling her, but then I hear something that makes me need to leave, and I know it's getting just as frustrating for her as it is for me."

"Well, let me warn you, Superman," Lois began.

"Please, call me Clark. I'd really prefer that. It's who I am. Superman is - "

"Just what you do? Now where have I heard that before?" Teri joked. "Anyway, Clark, if your Lois does what was scripted for me, it doesn't get any easier just because you've proposed! She does get really mad that you've kept such an important secret from you for so long. And, no, I'm not going to tell you anything more about your future right now. It wouldn't be fair to her if you knew so much about what might happen between you two. And anyway, we never filmed an episode like what's happening now, so maybe your future and hers have been changed by what Tempus is doing."

"And speaking of Tempus, we need to think about how I'm going to get home again." Clark reminded Teri.

For the next hour or two, Teri and Clark threw ideas around on how to return him home again. Teri was almost relieved that they weren't at home for her husband Jon to see this, but on the other hand, she would never get anyone else to believe it, so she regretted his absence. Every idea that Clark suggested, Teri believed wouldn't work in her world, and every thought that Teri had, Clark didn't know how to put into motion. They had reached a stalemate, and by late afternoon, or early evening, Clark felt the need to get out and get some fresh air, hoping that with it, he would be able to think more clearly and find a solution. The last thing either of them wanted to do was to wait the two more days in the hope that Tempus might return. Neither one believed in what Tempus had told Clark when he left him here.

Clark excused himself and left via the window, leaving Teri gaping in awe once more (and somewhat surprised that she felt that way, since he hadn't sat in a chair once at her house, and she thought she had become accustomed to it). As she sat back the phone rang, and she picked it up to hear a very familiar voice at the other end.

Chapter Nine

"Teri? What are you doing at my place? You won't believe what has happened to me! I'm at the studio and they said you'd gone home early today!"

"Dean? It is you, isn't it? You're back!" Teri sighed in enormous relief. "Hooray!"

"Back? How did you know I'd been away?"

"Dean, you have got to get over here quickly. There's someone visiting me today that you have just got to meet! It's the only way you'll believe what's been happening to me!"

"Hang on a moment. He's there, isn't he?" Dean was almost afraid to say the name out loud. It would confirm his thoughts and that was even more scary because it would mean that what he thought had happened to him in the last day or so, must have been real!

"He? Yes, Dean, Clark is here, and we don't know how to get him home again. How did you get back?"

"Teri, I have, believe it or not, a working model of Tempus' time machine behind my trailer. I've been to that world."

"Dean, I love you! Look, Clark just flew off for some fresh air. We'll be over there as soon as he gets back."

"He what? Did you say he "flew"? Ohmigod!"

"Well, Dean," Teri could hear a whistling wind sound, which made her think that perhaps Clark was returning, "he is Superman, after all." She giggled, and went to open the window again to let Clark in. "We'll be there soon, Dean."

As she hung up the phone, Clark walked into the room. "Who was that? Where are we going?"

"Oh Clark, I'm so glad you weren't gone for long! We've got access to a working model of Tempus' machine! You'll be able to get home now!"

"A working model? How? Who were you talking to?"

"It's Dean. He has been on your world, and he's back, with a working time machine. We have to get back to the studio quickly!"

Clark was so relieved. He had had a feeling that going out for a quick flight would help solve his problem, but he had had no idea the solution would come in this form. However, he was somewhat nervous about the concept of meeting his twin, or doppelganger, or whatever you wanted to call it.

"What's the best way there, Teri?"

"By air, I'd say, Clark. Wouldn't you?" Teri smiled as Clark scooped her up into his arms. He walked back to the open window, and gently took off in the direction indicated by her. "Not many people on this planet would be able to say they've been taken flying by Superman." she joked, slightly nervously.

"And I can think of just one person who actually belongs here who will believe that you've done it," replied Clark. Suddenly Teri realised just how fast they must have been flying, because they were already arriving at Dean's trailer.

As Clark landed, the door of the trailer opened, and the owner emerged down the steps. Each man stopped to appraise the other, and Teri faded into the background, watching, fascinatedly as the two seeming twins took each other's measure.

After a few moments, she noticed that neither of them seemed game enough to say the first words. It occurred to her that it appeared they were afraid that talking to each other, or even acknowledging the other's existence out loud might make one or the other vanish into limbo. Nervous herself, she took the first step, falling back on the etiquette books she had read as a teenager.

"Clark, I'd like you to meet Dean Cain. Dean, this is Clark Kent. We couldn't figure out how to get Clark home again, and he has to get back quickly, because Lois is about to discover the secret somehow and -"

"And we are really glad you are back and have a working machine," continued Clark, not noticing Dean's blush of embarrassment. "Teri was under the impression that machines like this won't work on this world."

Dean ushered the pair into his trailer, shaking his head. "Normally I think, they wouldn't, but this is the same machine that took me to your world, and we - er - I found the instructions for it that you wrote hidden in your secret closet, so I could actually figure out how to work the machine to get home again. One question: Were you really badly disoriented when you got here?"

Clark nodded.

"Well, you'll be happy to know it isn't quite so bad coming home as when I first arrived on your planet."

Teri watched this exchange with amazement. She found that if she shut her eyes, she honestly couldn't tell which of the men was speaking. It got even worse a moment later.

"Hey," both men began at once as the same idea occurred to each of them simultaneously. "You're a writer, aren't you? Are you going to write about this?"

They both stopped at the same time too, and then grinned matching grins at each other.

Teri interrupted them with a laugh, "Guys, this is just too weird for words. Clark, we haven't done anything quite like this in any episodes we've filmed, so far; but y'know Dean, why don't we sort of kind of suggest something along these lines to Eugenie and Brad, and see what happens."

"For now, though," said Clark, "I think I ought to be getting home. I have some important things I need to talk about with Lois, and I don't want to delay any more."

Dean took Clark around the back of the trailer, to where the time machine was, and set the controls to take him back home.

The power started to build up, becoming louder and louder. Dean and

Teri both put their hands over their ears to protect them; the machine had begun to develop a foggy cloud around it, when suddenly Dean remembered he wanted to confess something to Clark.

"She already knows!" He shouted.

"What?" They could lipread what Clark was shouting back to them.

"She already knows!" repeated Dean and Teri together, shouting as loudly as they could.

But they would never know whether or not he had heard or understood them, for quite suddenly, the machine and its cloud were gone, and the air reverberated around the place it had been.

Epilogue

Clark and Lois went for a quiet walk in Centennial Park that evening. Neither knew how to begin to tell the other of the events they had witnessed or been through the past two days, so they walked in silence for a while. Eventually, Clark put his arm around Lois' shoulder and began:

"Lois, I've been thinking."

"Me too."

"What about?" he asked, hoping that he could think of some way to tell her about Teri Hatcher and what she had told him.

"You first," she said.

'Darn', he thought, but tried to think of how to tell her everything... there was so much to tell.

"Okay," he began. "Sometimes, you think you're immortal. You start to think that the people around you are too. It just takes a second to realise how wrong you are, about everything." He led her to the fountain, and invited her to sit. As the rain that had been threatening all evening finally chose this moment to descend, he looked upward, and in frustration wished out loud, "Come on! Give me a break!"

Lois looked up, and with a nervous giggle, because she too had a lot on her mind that she wanted to discuss with him, she offered to go back to where there was shelter.

Clark demurred, "If the earth opened up at my feet, I wouldn't move until I'd said this." Then it came to him - he'd propose first, and then tell her the secret, straight away. That was the way to do it! He knelt at her feet, and continued.

"Lois, will you marry me?" There was a bolt of lightning and the rain started to pour down even harder.

Then Lois caught him totally off-guard with her own lightning bolt, by reaching up, removing his glasses, and asking him, "Who's asking? Clark? Or Superman?"

As they ran for the shelter of the nearby buildings, neither Clark nor Lois said any more, although both had crazy thoughts going through their minds.

Taking refuge in the craziest of comments, Clark asked Lois whether it was the new glasses that had given away his secret. But he knew that he needed to know how long ago Lois had learned his secret.

For her part, Lois couldn't believe that he had actually thought he would get away with proposing without admitting to her himself what the secret was. Was this really going to turn out exactly the way the actor from another world had said it would? And now Clark was asking her how she had figured it out. What could she say? Suddenly, she had a flashback of memories of Clark and of Superman each holding her face. The same tender way. Somehow, that motion epitomised his love for her, and she knew she could tell him that this was how she had figured it out.

"So, how long have I known? Since yesterday." (That was the truth, anyway!) "How did I figure it out? When you did this," she demonstrated the motion she recalled so vividly. "You've touched me like that before, both of you. I guess almost dying sort of heightened all my senses. Sort of like putting on a pair of glasses."

Clark was almost relieved. She had figured it out on her own. He had expected a different reaction. He wasn't sure what, but it didn't feel right that she hadn't gotten mad at him for keeping the secret from her. He still expected that to happen at some point. But first he had to tell her everything about the last few days.

As he drew breath to begin, she did too.

"Clark, I have to be honest with you. What I just told you was one of the things that clued me into who you really are, but there was more to it than that. Something happened while I was at home yesterday and today, that I think you should know about. I had a visitor... um, I'm not sure how to explain this..."

Suddenly Clark guessed what Dean Cain and Teri Hatcher had been trying to tell him and continued for Lois, "called Dean Cain?"

"You know? How?"

"Because somehow, for some reason, which I don't yet know, I was swapped with him; I went to his world, and had to try to be him until he came back to get me. His world is such a strange place.

"While I was there, I met a woman who reminded me a lot of you. Being there, and meeting her, made me realise that when I got home (and I knew I'd make it back somehow) I couldn't go on without telling you the secret, without making you more a part of my life. I had wanted to do that so much in the past few weeks, but I just couldn't do it. I guess it was just so ingrained in me to keep the secret or something..." The rain had stopped, and the couple continued their walk.

"Look, Lois, I'm sorry that my proposal came out sounding that way. It wasn't what I intended. Are you mad at me?"

"I'm not mad at you."

"Lois, this is no time to be holding back." Clark want to encourage Lois, and get the worst over quickly.

"Really, I'm not."

"I was talking to Lois Lane; she was here a minute ago..."

"I'm not mad," Lois continued, "I'm hurt."

"Which is worse than you being mad. Lois, I've been practising this for months, let's see if I can get it right... I know this must be a shock to you, and I wanted to let you know how hard it's been carrying this secret by myself. I've wanted to tell you for a long time, but when I decided to become Superman, I-"

"You became a target and anyone close to you became a target and it got more complicated when you fell in love with me."

"Which was about two minutes after I first met you."

"Don't try to score points with me, Kent." Lois bit out. "Look, I understand where you're coming from. I really do. Dean said that he felt the same way. But when it comes down to it, you made me believe you were two different people, and you did that by lying to me. And that makes me feel like I don't know you... and that really hurts. And you know what? I am mad!"

"Good, get it all out!" Clark encouraged Lois. He was glad that she was at least reacting the way he had expected. Then suddenly they heard a cry for help. Lois looked at Clark expectantly, but before he spun into his costume (for the first time, in front of her!), he paused.

"Lois, I'll be back soon. We really do have a lot to talk about."

. Some people have asked whether this story was based on a similar (published) Star Trek fanfic story (Visit to a Weird Planet Revisited) where William Shatner, DeForrest Kelly and Leonard Nimoy get transported to the bridge of the Enterprise and have to be their alter egos until Scotty (the real one) can get them home. Actually, I came up with this idea independently, but there are some similarities, and I admit to having read that story many years ago. But I promise that until it was mentioned in reaction to my idea, I had forgotten that story.

Interestingly, on Sunday January 19, 1997, when Dean made an appearance on #grapejam on IRC, the following exchange occurred:

Dean, if you were kidnapped by Tempus and swapped with Clark Kent, how would you react?

Jenerator- Id be shocked to say the least. We're filming something very similar to that right now. The tempest does return.

.. Right from the word go, with this story, I knew how I wanted it to end, and my plan notes for the story say "They changed the ending of

ATAI to suit themselves for WHALTTA, so why shouldn't I change it to suit myself." So I did.

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